

Sierra Vista Herald
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The Rev. Rod Richards

“The president firmly believes that marriage is an enduring and sacred institution between men and women and has supported measures to protect the sanctity of marriage,” White House spokesman Ken Lisaius said, explaining Bush's support for the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. (Associated Press, June 1, 2006)

Protecting *the sanctity of marriage* by banning gay marriage? Oh, please! It's like supporting a constitutional amendment in 1920 barring women from voting to *protect the sanctity* of elections. Constitutional amendments have traditionally been used—thank God—to broaden our perspectives rather than narrow them; to expand citizens' rights rather than restrict them; to dismantle discrimination rather than institutionalize it.

I am a minister. I have met with many couples who are planning to get married, and one of the things I ask them to explore in these pre-wedding meetings is what they fear could happen in their marriage. What could endanger their commitment to one another? What could threaten their ability to keep the promises they so desperately wish to make to one another at this point in their lives?

These couples say they don't want to ever take each other for granted. They want to work on communicating well. They want to be kind and forgiving. They want to be there for each other and also give each other the space to grow into the individuals they will become. They don't want to grow apart through apathy or anger or inattention, making themselves vulnerable to the sometimes-tempting obsessions of work, or alcohol and drugs, or the empty enticements of extramarital affairs.

When I ask them to name a couple that supplies a model of the kind of marriage they want to have, they sometimes fidget uncomfortably and look to each other in bewilderment. All too often, they cannot name any promising models of what they believe marriage should be. Their parents are on second or third marriages, friends' relationships are broken or in trouble, and even the lasting marital unions in their wider circle of friends and family seem to continue from inertia rather than passion and commitment.

Once given the opportunity to voice their fears, it becomes evident that there are plenty of things that can threaten a marriage...Yet, not one of these individuals, on the brink of making what they believe will be a life-long commitment; not one of these lovestruck men and women, awakening to the task they have set before themselves; not one of these idealistic people, standing bravely against the odds; not one of these loving, determined souls, who have so courageously named what they most feared could happen in a marriage; not one of them has mentioned the specter of two people of the same sex getting married as a threat to their own relationship. I have never heard anything like: “I am afraid that, once we get married, gay marriage will be legalized, and thus our marriage will no longer be sacred...our union will no longer be sanctified...our stated commitment in front of our God and our family and friends will no longer endure.” Never...

I know that, as a Unitarian Universalist minister, people will say that the people who come to me to get married already have liberal views on this issue. That may be true...However, I think this has less to do with liberal or conservative *views* and more to do with *experience*. The couples are very clear about where the pressures come from that could threaten their sincere desire to commit themselves to each other, and it is not from another couple who shares the same desire, no matter if that couple is gay or straight. Nor would anyone's marriage be strengthened by having the Federal Government deny certain Americans and their families of over 1,000 federal benefits of marriage, such as health care, hospital visitation, and family medical leave, stripping same-sex couples of key legal benefits supplied by states and localities, such as domestic partner benefits.

Let's call this proposed amendment what it is: mean-spirited political posturing. Not much sanctity to be found in that.

--Rev. Rod Richards